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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 003936

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#) [ITALY](#) [NATIONAL](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: ON IRAQ CENTER-LEFT MOVES RIGHT

REF: A. ROME 3376

[1](#)B. ROME 3467

[1](#)C. ROME 3763

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David D. Pearce for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: DS Party Secretary Piero Fassino says that if a Center-Left government comes to power next spring it would withdraw troops from Iraq in close coordination with the Iraqi government, the U.S. and other allies. A DS Official told us that Center-Left PM candidate Romano Prodi had approved Fassino's statement in advance. Reformist members of the Center-left have embraced Fassino's proposal, but the Greens and Italian Communist party, both member's of Prodi's Union coalition, have threatened to abandon the coalition if Italian troop withdrawal from Iraq is not immediate. END SUMMARY.

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CENTER LEFT TAKES MODERATE VIEW ON IRAQ DEPLOYMENT  
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[1](#)2. (C) Democrats of the Left (DS) Party Secretary Piero Fassino, seen as a potential Foreign Minister in a future Center-Left government, said in a November 6 interview, "Together with the Iraqis, the Americans, and the British we will discuss a calendar for withdrawal useful to the Iraqi transition" if the Center-Left wins the Spring 2006 elections. At a party conference one week later, Fassino said that troop withdrawal would be gradual and in consultation with the Iraqi government. Fassino's phrasing differed slightly from Center-Left leader Romano Prodi's standard line that if elected, he would "establish an agenda to withdraw its military from Iraq and engage the country in reconstruction." Head of the DS Office of International Affairs Lucciano Vecchi assured Poloff that Fassino had cleared his comments with Prodi in advance.

[1](#)3. (U) Other leaders of the "reformist" component of the Center-Left coalition have since echoed Fassino's comments. Daisy Party leader Francesco Rutelli immediately confirmed Fassino's statement that the Center-Left would discuss the withdrawal with allies and with the government of Iraq. Radical party leader and former EU Commissioner Emma Bonino welcomed the newly enunciated position of the Center-Left. She had previously said, "Today, pulling out of Iraq would only mean putting the country in the hands of headhunters and civil war...We were against the war...but once war was declared we must chose which side to take." Italian Social Democrat (SDI) leader Enrico Boselli responded similarly, that, " We must understand what is happening to Iraq's fragile democracy and not leave it in the hands of terrorists."

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RADICAL LEFT STILL FAVORS IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) Fassino's comments sparked a strong negative reply from radical fringes of the Center-Left coalition. Il Manifesto, the newspaper for the extreme left Communist Renewal Party (RC), strongly criticized Fassino's comments in a November 8 editorial, saying it is one thing to say a Center-Left government would fix a calendar and something else to say any troop withdrawals would be coordinated with the Americans, "who are in no hurry to leave." The Center-Left's three radical members, the Communist Renewal (RC), Italian Communist Party (PDCI), and the Greens continue to call for the immediate withdrawal of all Italian troops from Iraq.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Communist Renewal leader Fausto Bertinotti has generally been considered the radical left's spokesperson on the issue of Italian troop withdrawal. However, his tone has moderated slightly since his striking defeat in the Center-Left's October 16 primary (REFS A and B). He responded to Fassino's comments that Fassino should be careful not to "cause confusion" and not to "play with words." Press commentators suggest Bertinotti has toned down his rhetoric in order to avoid a public dispute with Prodi. The Green's Pecoraro Scanio, trying to appeal to the pacifist left, said November 15, "On April 10, he (Prodi) will announce the withdrawal of our troops from Iraq." He continued, "It has to be clear to our allies that if there is no withdrawal, then there is no government by the Union,

because we would pull out." Scanio says a withdrawal must take no more than two or three months.

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COALITION PLATFORM DEBATE A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME  
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16. (C) Daisy Party Foreign Affairs Adviser Luca Bader told Poloff that the Union is currently negotiating the coalition platform, which the Union will present on January 21. According to the press, PDCI Foreign Affairs representative Jacopo Venier stormed out of a November 24 platform negotiation on Iraq. Venier was quoted saying, "The text they have proposed is unacceptable. Sandro Bondi (FI) could sign it." Venier said he was dissatisfied with the line proposing, "We will immediately propose to our Parliament that we withdraw our contingent from Iraq, defining, in consultation with Iraqi authorities, the modalities, with the goal of ensuring security." Venier said the PDCI's position remains that troop withdrawal must be immediate and unconditional. Venier complained that he was told the language could not be changed because the DS and Bertinotti's RC had already agreed on it.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) COMMENT: With active encouragement from Iraqi President Talibani (REF C), Washington visitors, and the Embassy, the reformist component of the Center-Left coalition has publicly moved to a policy on Italian troop deployments in Iraq that is nearly indistinguishable from the Berlusconi government's policy: troop withdrawal in consultation with the Iraqi government and its allies with a lingering commitment to civil reconstruction. The issue is whether Prodi and his moderate allies could force that policy on the radical left in the event of a Center-Left victory. Opinion polls show the Center-Left's lead has narrowed from eight percentage points in August to within the range of statistical error in the most recent polls. Ironically, a close victory by the Center-Left would strengthen the extremist parties' relative importance to the coalition and give Prodi less flexibility. END COMMENT.  
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